

REMARKS

The Applicants thank the Examiner for the thorough consideration given the present application. Claim 4 was previously cancelled without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter contained therein. Claims 1-3 and 5-21 are pending. Claims 1, 16, 17, and 21 are amended. Claims 1, 16, and 21 are independent. The Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider the rejections in view of the amendments and remarks set forth herein.

Objection to the Amendment and Claims

In response to the Examiner's objection to paragraph [0014] of the specification, and claims 1, 14, 16, 17, and 21, the Applicants have amended paragraph [0014] of the specification and have amended claims 1, 16, 17, and 21. Paragraph [0014] of the specification is now consistent with paragraph [0017] of the specification, with FIGS. 3 and 5, and with dependent claim 17 as amended herein. No new matter has been added. Claim 14 as previously presented appears to be in proper form.

Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the objections are respectfully requested.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 1-3 and 5-21 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Iimuro (U.S. 6,679,347) in view of Nagashii (U.S. 6,502,658). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Arguments Regarding Independent Claims 1, 16, and 21

As noted above, each of independent claims 1, 16, and 21 has been amended herein to recite a combination of elements, including *inter alia*

the upper-most edge of each of the pipe members being curved in an upward direction when viewed from a side view, and having an outwardly facing convex shape when viewed from a top view.

See FIGS. 1 and 3 of the present application for support.

By contrast, as can be seen in Iimuro FIGS. 1-4 and Nagashii FIGS 1-3, these documents merely disclose upper-most edges of pipe members that are convex outwardly when viewed from the above, but do NOT disclose the upper-most edge of the pipe members being curved in an upward direction when viewed from a side view, as presently claimed.

Thus, both of the Iimuro and Nagashii documents disclose configurations that are completely different from that of the present invention.

Applicants respectfully submit that the combination of elements as set forth in each of independent claims 1, 16, and 21 is not disclosed or made obvious by the prior art of record, including Iimuro and Nagahsii, at least for the reason explained above.

Therefore, independent claims 1, 16, and 21 are in condition for allowance.

All dependent claims are in condition for allowance due to their dependency from allowable independent claims, or due to the additional novel features set forth therein.

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Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) are respectfully requested.

All claims of the present application are now in condition for allowance.

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CONCLUSION

All of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. It is believed that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action, and that the present application is in condition for allowance.

If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, he is invited to telephone Carl T. Thomsen (Reg. No. 50,786) at (703) 208-4030 (direct line).

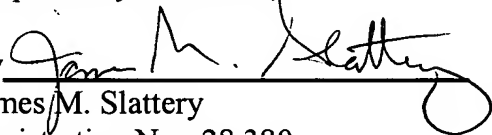
If necessary, the commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies to charge payment or credit any overpayment to deposit account no. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 c.f.r. §§1.16 or 1.17, particularly extension of time fees.

Dated: January 3, 2007

JMS/CTT/jmh



Respectfully submitted,

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